

**CALVIN
ON THE
FREE OFFER
OF THE GOSPEL**

JOHN CALVIN

CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON MARK 10:21:
JESUS' LOVE TO THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

Jesus beholding him, loved him. The inference which the Papists draw from this, that works morally good—that is, works which are not performed by the impulse of the Spirit, but go before regeneration—have *the merit of congruity*, is an excessively childish contrivance. For if *merit* be alleged to be the consequence of the love of God, we must then say that frogs and fleas have merit, because all the creatures of God, without exception, are the objects of his love. To distinguish the degrees of love is, therefore, a matter of importance [French edition of Calvin's comments states it this way: *wherefore it is necessary to state some distinction, and to observe that there are various degrees of love in God*]. As to the present passage, it may be enough to state briefly, that God embraces in fatherly love none but his children, whom he has regenerated with the Spirit of adoption, and that it is in consequence of this love that they are accepted at his tribunal. In this sense, to be loved by God, and to be justified in his sight, are synonymous terms.

But God is sometimes said to *love* those whom he does not approve or justify; for, since the preservation of the human race is agreeable to Him—which consists in justice, uprightness, moderation, prudence, fidelity, and temperance—he is said to *love* the political virtues; not that they are meritorious of salvation or of grace, but that they have reference to an end of which he approves. In this sense, under various points of view, God *loved* Aristides and Fabricius, and also *hated* them; for, in so far as he had bestowed on them outward righteousness, and that for the general advantage, he *loved* his own work in them; but as their heart was impure, the outward semblance of righteousness was of no avail for obtaining righteousness. For we know that by faith alone hearts are

purified, and that the Spirit of uprightness is given to the members of Christ alone. Thus the question is answered, How was it possible that Christ should *love* a man who was proud and a hypocrite, while nothing is more hateful to God than these two vices? For it is not inconsistent, that the good seed, which God has implanted in some natures, shall be *loved* by Him, and yet that He should reject their persons. And works on account of corruption.

CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON LUKE 22:51:
GOD'S UNMERITED KINDNESS TO THE
REPROBATE.

And having touched his ear, he healed him. By his foolish zeal Peter had brought grievous reproach on his master and his doctrine; and there can be no doubt, that this was a contrivance by which Satan attempted to involve the Gospel in eternal disgrace, as if Christ had kept company with assassins and seditious persons for revolutionary purposes. This, I think, was the reason why Christ healed the wound which Peter had inflicted. But a fearful and amazing stupidity must have seized his adversaries, who were not at all affected by having seen such a miracle. And yet there is the less reason to wonder that they did not see the power of Christ displayed in the person of another, when, after having themselves been laid prostrate by his voice, they still continued to rage, John 18:6. Such is the spirit of giddiness by which Satan maddens the reprobate, when the Lord has given them over to blindness. Above all, in the person himself who was healed, there is a striking instance of ingratitude; for neither did the divine power of Christ subdue him to repentance for his hardness, nor was he overcome by kindness so as to be changed from an enemy into a disciple. For it is a foolish imagination of the monks

that he was also *healed* in his soul, that the work of Christ might not be left incomplete; as if the goodness of God were not every day poured out on those who are unworthy.

CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON 1 TIM. 4:10: GOD
WHO IS THE SAVIOR OF ALL MEN.

[T]he word *σωτηρ* [lit. *soter*—Savior] is here a general term, and denotes one who defends and preserves. He means that the kindness of God extends to all men. And if there is no man who does not feel the goodness of God towards him, and who is not a partaker of it, how much more shall it be experienced by the godly, who hope in him? Will he not take peculiar care in them? Will he not more freely pour out his bounty on them? In a word, will he not, in every respect, keep them safe to the end?

CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON 2 PETER 3:9:
GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY WHO
HEAR THE GOSPEL PREACHED SHOULD
PERISH.

Not willing that any should perish. So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But the order is to be noticed, that God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish; for in these words the way and manner of obtaining salvation is pointed out. Every one of us, therefore, who is desirous of salvation, must learn to enter in by this way.

But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed

to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world.

But as the verb *χωρησαι* is often taken passively by the Greeks, no less suitable to this passage is the verb which I have put in the margin, that God would have all, who had been before wandering and scattered, to be gathered or come together to repentance.

**CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON ACTS 2:21: GOD
SETS THE GATE OF SALVATION OPEN IN
THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.**

Whosoever shall call upon. An excellent place. For as God doth prick us forward like sluggish asses, with threatenings and terrors to seek salvation, so, after that he hath brought darkness upon the face of heaven and earth, yet doth he show a means whereby salvation may shine before our eyes, to wit, if we shall call upon him. For we must diligently note this circumstance. If God should promise salvation simply, it were a great matter; but it is a far greater when as he promiseth the same amidst manifold dungeons of death. Whilst that (saith he) all things shall be out of order, and the fear of destruction shall possess all things, only call upon me, and ye shall be saved. Therefore, howsoever man be swallowed up in the gulf of miseries, yet is there set before him a way to escape. We must also note the universal word, *whosoever*. For God admitteth all men unto himself without exception, and by this means doth he invite them to salvation, as Paul gathereth in the tenth chapter to the Romans, and as the prophet

had set it down before, "Thou, Lord, which hearest the prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come," (Ps. 65:2).

Therefore, forasmuch as no man is excluded from calling upon God, the gate of salvation is set open unto all men; neither is there any other thing which keepeth us back from entering in, save only our own unbelief. I speak of all unto whom God doth make himself manifest by the gospel. But like as those which call upon the name of the Lord are sure of salvation, so we must think that, without the same, we are thrice miserable and undone.

**CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON ROM. 1:16:
JESUS CHRIST FREELY OFFERED IN THE
GOSPEL.**

[O]bserve how much Paul ascribes to the ministry of the word, when he testifies that God thereby puts forth his power to save; for he speaks not here of any secret revelation, but of vocal preaching. It hence follows, that those as it were willfully despise the power of God, and drive away from them his delivering hand, who withdraw themselves from the hearing of the word.

At the same time, as he works not effectually in all, but only where the Spirit, the inward Teacher, illuminates the heart, he subjoins, *To every one who believeth*. The gospel is indeed offered to all for their salvation, but the power of it appears not every where: and that it is the savour of death to the ungodly, does not proceed from what it is, but from their own wickedness. By setting forth but one salvation he cuts off every other trust. When men withdraw themselves from this one salvation, they find in the gospel a sure proof of their own ruin. Since then the gospel invites all to partake of salvation without any difference, it is

rightly called the doctrine of salvation: for Christ is there offered, whose peculiar office is to save that which was lost; and those who refuse to be saved by him, shall find him a Judge. But everywhere in Scripture the word salvation is simply set in opposition to the word destruction: and hence we must observe, when it is mentioned, what the subject of the discourse is. Since then the gospel delivers from ruin and the curse of endless death, its salvation is eternal life.

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CALVIN ON EZEKIEL 18:32.

“For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye”.

We see, therefore, how God throws off that false reproach from himself with which the children of Israel taunted him, saying, that they perished by his immoderate rigor, and could find no reason for his severity against them. He announces, on the other hand, that the cause of death rested with themselves; and then he points out the remedy, that they should amend their life, not only in outward appearance, but in sincerity of heart: and at the same time he testifies his willingness to be entreated; nay, he meets them of his own accord, if they only repent heartily and unfeignedly. We now understand the prophet's meaning. We said, that we are admonished in this way, that if we desire to return to God we must begin at the beginning, namely, renewal of the heart and spirit; because, as Jeremiah says, he looks for truth and integrity, and does not value outward disguises (Chap. 5:3). But it may seem absurd for God to exhort the Israelites to form their hearts anew: and men badly trained in the Scriptures erect their crests under the pretense of this passage, as if it were in the power of man's free will to convert himself. They exclaim, therefore, either that God here exhorts his people

deceitfully, or else that when alienated from him we can by our own movement repent, and return into the way. But the whole Scripture openly refutes this. It is not in vain that the saints so often pray that God would renew them; (Ps. 51:12, and very often elsewhere): for it would be a feigned and a lying prayer, if newness of heart were not his gift. If any one requests of God what he is persuaded that he has already, and by his own inherent virtue, does he not trifle with God? But nothing occurs more frequently than this mode of entreaty. Since, therefore, the saints pray to God to renew them, they doubtless confess that to be his peculiar gift; and unless he moves his hand, they have no strength remaining, so that they can never rise from the ground. Besides, in many passages God claims the renewal of the heart as peculiar to himself. We noticed that remarkable passage in the eleventh chapter of this Prophet, (ver. 19), he will repeat the same in the thirty-sixth chapter, (ver. 26,27); and we know what Jeremiah says in his thirty-first chapter, (ver. 33). But Scripture is everywhere full of testimonies of this kind, so that it would be superfluous to heap together many passages; nay, if any one denies that regeneration is a gift of the Holy Spirit, he will tear up by the roots all the principles of piety. We have said that regeneration is like another creation; and if we compare it with the first creation, it far surpasses it. For it is much better for us to be made children of God, and reformed after his image within us, than to be created mortal; for we are born children of wrath, corrupt and degenerate; (Eph. 2:3); since all integrity was lost when God's image was removed. We see, then, the nature of our first creation; but when God refashions us, we are not only born sons of Adam, but we are the brothers of

angels, and members of Christ; and this our second life consists in rectitude, justice, and the light of true intelligence.

We now see that if it had been in man's free will to convert himself, much more would be ascribed to him than to God, because, as we have said, it was much more valuable to be created sons of God than of Adam. It ought, then, to be beyond all controversy with the pious that men cannot rise again when they are fallen, and turn of themselves when alienated from God; but this is the peculiar gift of the Holy Spirit. And the sophists, who in all ways endeavor to obscure God's grace, confess that half the act of conversion is in the power of the Holy Spirit: for they do not say that we are simply and totally converted by the motion of our own free will, but they imagine a concurrence of grace with free will, and of free will with grace. Thus they foolishly represent us as co-operating with God: they confess, indeed, that God's grace goes before and follows; and they seem to themselves very liberal towards God when they acknowledge this twofold grace in man's conversion. But God is not content with that partition, since he is deprived of half his right: for he does not say that he would assist men to renew themselves and to repent; but he attributes the work to himself entirely: I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. (Ezek. 36:26). If it is his to give, it follows that the slightest portion of it cannot be transferred to man without diminishing something from his right. But they object that the following precept is not in vain, *that men should make for themselves a new heart*. Now their deception arises through ignorance, from their judging of the powers of men by the commands of God; but the inference is incorrect, as we

have said elsewhere: for when God teaches what is right, he does not think of what we are able to do, but only shows us what we ought to do. When, therefore, the power of our free will is estimated by the precepts of God, we make a great mistake, because God exacts from us the strict discharge of our duty, just as if our power of obedience was not defective. We are not absolved from our obligation because we cannot pay it; for God holds us bound to himself, although we are in every way deficient.

They object again, God then deludes men when he says, *make yourselves a new heart*. I answer, we must always consider to what purpose God thus speaks, namely, that men convicted of sin may cease to throw the blame on any one else, as they often endeavor to do; for nothing is more natural than to transfer the cause of our condemnation away from ourselves, that we may seem just, and God appear unjust. Since, then, such depravity reigns among men, hence the Holy Spirit demands from us what all acknowledge they ought to pay: and if we do not pay it, still we are bound to do so, and thus all strife and complaint should cease. Thus, as it concerns the elect, when God shows them their duty, and they acknowledge that they cannot discharge it, they fly to the aid of the Holy Spirit, so that the outward exhortation becomes a kind of instrument which God uses to confer the grace of his Spirit. For although he gratuitously goes before us, and does not need outward channels, yet he desires exhortations to be useful to this end. Since, therefore, this doctrine stirs up the elect to deliver themselves up to be ruled by the Holy Spirit, we see how it becomes fruitful to us. Whence it follows, that God does not delude or deceive us when he exhorts *each of us to*

form his heart and his spirit afresh. In fine, Ezekiel wished by these words to show that pardon would be prepared for the Israelites if they seriously repented, and showed its effects through their whole life. That was most true, because the elect did not embrace this doctrine in vain, when at the same time God worked in them by his Spirit, and so turned them to himself. But the reprobate, though they do not cease to murmur, yet they are rendered ashamed, since all excuse has been removed, and they must perish through their own fault, since they willingly remained in their wickedness, and by self-indulgence they cherished the old man within themselves,—a fountain of all injustice. Whenever such passages occur, let us remember that celebrated prayer of Augustine: *Grant us what you command, and command what you wish*, (Epist. xxiv.); for otherwise, if God should lay upon us the slightest burden, we should be unable to bear it. Besides, our strength will be sufficient to fulfill his requirements, if only he supply it, and we are not so foolish as to think anything comprehended in his precepts which he has not granted to us; because, as I have said before, nothing is more perverse than to measure the angelic righteousness of the law by our strength. By the word *heart*, I understand him to mean the seat of all the affections and by *spirit*, the intellectual part of the soul. The heart is often taken for the reason and intelligence; but when these two words are joined together, the spirit relates to the mind, and so it is the intellectual faculty of the soul; but the heart is taken for the will, or the seat of all the affections. Hence we see how very corrupt the Israelites were, since they could not be otherwise reconciled to God, unless by being renewed in both heart and mind. Hence also we

may gather the general doctrine, that nothing in us is sound and perfect, and hence an entire renovation is necessary that we may please God.

The subjoined phrase, *why will ye die, O house of Israel?* suggests many questions. Here unskillful men think that God speculates on what men will do, and that the salvation or destruction of each depends on themselves, as if God had determined nothing concerning us before the foundation of the world. Hence they set him at nought, since they fancy that he is held in suspense and doubt as to the future end of every one, and that he is not so anxious for our salvation, as to wish all to be saved, but leaves it in the power of every one to perish or to be saved as he pleases. But as I have said, this would reduce God to a spectre. But we have no need of a long dispute, because Scripture everywhere declares with sufficient clearness that God has determined what shall happen to us: for he chose his own people before the foundation of the world and passed by others (Eph. 1:4). Nothing is clearer than this doctrine; for if there had been no predestination on God's part, there had been no deity, since he would be forced into order as if he were one of us: nay, men are to a certain extent provident, whenever God allows some sparks of his image to shine forth in them. If, therefore, the very smallest drop of foresight in men is laid hold of, how great must it be in the fountain itself? Insipid indeed is the comment, to fancy that God remains doubtful and waiting for what will happen to individuals, as if it were in their own power either to attain to salvation or to perish. But the Prophet's words are plain, for God testifies with grief that he *willeth not the death of a mortal*. I answer, that there is no absurdity, as we said

before, in God's undertaking a twofold character, not that he is two-faced himself, as those profane dogs blurt out against us, but because his counsels are incomprehensible by us. This indeed ought to be fixed, that before the foundation of the world we were predestinated either to life or death. Now because we cannot ascend to that height, it is needful for God to conform himself to our ignorance, and to descend in some way to us since we cannot ascend to him. When Scripture so often says that God has heard, and inquires, no one is offended: all pass over those forms of speech securely, and confess them adopted from human language (Gen. 16:11, and often). Very often, I say, God transfers to himself the properties of man, and this is admitted universally without either offense or controversy. Although this manner of speaking is rather harsh: God came to see, (Gen. 11:5), when he announces that he came to inquire about things openly known; it is easily excused, since nothing is less in accordance with his nature: for the solution is at hand, namely, that God speaks metaphorically, and adapts his speech to the convenience of men. Now why will not the same reasoning avail in the present case? for with respect to the law and the whole teaching of the prophets, God announces his wish that all should be saved. And surely if we consider the tendency of the heavenly teaching, we shall find that all are promiscuously called to salvation. For the law was a way of life, as Moses testifies, This is the way, walk ye in it: again, Whosoever has done those things shall live in them: and, again, This is your life (Deut. 30:15,19; 32:47; Lev. 18:5; Is. 30:21). Then of his own accord God offers himself as merciful to his ancient people, so that this heavenly teaching ought to be life-giving. But

what is the Gospel? It is God's power unto salvation to every believer, says Paul (Rom. 1:16). Therefore God *delighteth not in the death of him who dieth*, if he repent at his teaching. But if we wish to penetrate to his incomprehensible counsel, this will be another objection: Oh! but in this way God is chargeable with duplicity;—but I have denied this, though he takes up a twofold character, because this was necessary for our comprehension. Meanwhile Ezekiel announces this very truly as far as doctrine is concerned, *that God willeth not the death of him that perisheth*: for the explanation follows directly afterwards, *be ye converted and live*. Why does not God delight in the death of him who perishes? Because he invites all to repentance and rejects no one. Since this is so, it follows that he is not delighted by the death of him who perishes: hence there is nothing in this passage doubtful or thorny, and we should also hold that we are led aside by speculations too deep for us. For God does not wish us to inquire into his secret counsels: His secrets are with himself, says Moses, (Deut. 29:29), but this book for ourselves and our children. Moses there distinguishes between the hidden counsel of God, (which if we desire to investigate too curiously we shall tread on a profound abyss), and the teaching delivered to us. Hence let us leave to God his own secrets, and exercise ourselves as far as we can in the law, in which God's will is made plain to us and to our children.

CALVIN'S COMMENTS ON ACTS 19:9.

Seeing their hearts were hardened. We do not read that Paul was heard so patiently and so favorably by the Jews at any place as at Ephesus at his first coming. For whereas others raising tumults did drive him away, he was requested by these to tarry longer. Now, after that he had endeavored, by the space of three months, to erect the kingdom of God among them, the ungodliness and stubbornness of many doth show itself. For Luke saith that they were hardened; and surely such is the power of the heavenly doctrine, that it doth either make the reprobate mad or else more obstinate; and that not of nature, but accidentally, as they say, because, when they be urged by the truth, their secret poison breaketh out.

Luke addeth that they spake evil of the way before the people. For the contemnors of the gospel do resist that deadlily among others which they will not embrace. And this do they to no other end, save only because they be desirous (if it can be) to have all men partners in their impiety. It is well known that every ordinance is understood by this word *way*; but here it is referred unto the gospel of Christ. Now, Luke saith that Paul departed from them, and did separate the brethren, by which example we are taught, that when we have experience of desperate and incurable stubbornness, we must lose our labor no longer. Therefore, Paul admonisheth Titus to avoid a man that is an heretic, after once or twice admonition, (Tit. 3:10). For the word of God is unjustly blasphemed, if it be cast to dogs and swine. Also, we must provide for the weak, lest through wicked backbitings and slandering of sound doctrine, their godliness be subverted. Therefore, Paul did separate the disciples, lest the goats should with their stink infect the flock of sheep; secondly, that the pure worshippers of God might make profession freely.

***AN EXTRACT FROM JAMES WEBSTER'S
SERMON ON THE WAGES OF SIN, WHEREIN HE
DISPLAYS SOME BIBLE SYNONYMS FOR 'HELL.'***

1. It is called Tophet. Look to your Bibles, and remember it, Isa. 30:33. I have sometimes explained it to you, and perhaps some of you have forgot it. "Tophet is ordained of old, for the king it is prepared, he hath made it (that is, God hath made it) deep and large;" there are many folks to go to it, it must be a capacious prison; "the pile thereof is fire and much wood, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. Tophet is ordained of old;" yea, God hath designed a hell from eternity, as well as heaven. What was this Tophet? it was a place within a mile of Jerusalem, belonging to the sons of Hinnom; the Bible tells you that; and all the filth and nastiness of Jerusalem was thrown out there, and a fire was kept continually burning there, to consume that nastiness. When the Jews came to be devilish idolaters, they sacrificed their children unto Moloch in that valley of Hinnom. In this Tophet, they had the image or statue of a man, and a burning fire within this brazen statue; and when it was red hot with fire, they put their sons in the arms of it, whereby they roared to death; and to drown the cries and screeches of their own children, they caused drums to be beaten; and hence comes the word Tophet, which in the Hebrew signifies beating of drums. In this we have a lively resemblance of hell; God takes his rebellious children, casts them into the fire, puts them into the arms of destruction, and out of Christ: "He that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will shew them no favour."

2. It is called in scripture the bottomless pit. I dare not here give way to fancy; but if I durst employ my invention, I would let you see, that it is very probable, that they in hell seem to be going down, down, down, for ever and ever. O the eternal sinking condition of those that are shut up in the bottomless pit.

3. It is called utter darkness, Matt. 25:30. "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness." It is a word seems to have two senses; for the meaning is, it is superlative, that is, extreme darkness; or, it respects the situation of a place, because they had their dark dungeons and prisons without the city, and the darkness there was utter darkness. Whatever be of this, in hell there is no light of comfort, no light of hope, no light of joy, no light of satisfaction from the company they are with; it is utter darkness, a fire, and yet without light.—(1764).

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FAITH'S ENCOURAGEMENT;

OR,

***THE GOSPEL HEARER'S RIGHT TO AND
INTEREST IN CHRIST BEFORE BELIEVING, A
GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT, AND THE ONLY
ENCOURAGEMENT TO BELIEVE.***

The above enunciation may, perhaps, astonish some of my readers. To speak of a gospel hearer having an interest in Christ before he believes, I am aware will be considered by many to be a great error. But I am firmly persuaded that it is a great gospel truth; and so much a truth of the gospel, that none will ever believe, rightly, but through something which amounts to a persuasion of it in themselves; though some who have this persuasion, or believe in this way, may not know it, so far as the truth is expressed in appropriate language, that their believing is grounded upon a conviction of this kind.

My reason for calling the attention of readers to this subject, at present, is: It is very commonly taught, and believed among those who lay a claim to orthodoxy, in the Calvinistic sense of that term, that a sinner has no interest in Christ until he believes, no right to the blessings he has purchased, and the expression, *an interest in Christ*, is almost uniformly referred to the persons of believers, or those who are already in a state of grace, as if to such only

that term can apply; while some have used the expression, *a saving interest in Christ*, to distinguish, I suppose, between a common interest in him, which hearers of the gospel have, and that which is considered to be peculiar to believers. And if this distinction was generally admitted, so as the first should not be called in question, namely, that common interest in him which all hearers of the gospel have, through the gospel itself, I should not have deemed it necessary to give any opinion on this subject, as now I am to do; though I am not certain that the expression, *a saving interest in Christ*, is a very correct one, [because] what follows believing, in the way of Christian privilege, is possession, properly, unless it is used in reference to blessings not yet received, but promised in the gospel to believers [such] as an increase in grace, further communion with Christ, etc. A person may have an interest where he has not possession. He may have an interest in a house, a farm, a store, or any other property, which he does not possess as to the thing or property itself, and may never possess. He may have an interest in a testament, or any deed of writing which refers to property, and to the property referred to in said deed, through that instrument, which he may never possess through his own negligence, or through some other cause by which he is deprived, or shuts himself out of his right. A man has an interest in a bank on which he holds a note, though he may never receive that which he has a right to, as he may never apply to the bank for that purpose, or he may give away his right to another, or lose it by losing the bill. And where possession is, in property, that is one's own, the word

interest does not apply in the common use of the term. If a man owns a house or a farm, and occupies it, we do not say that he has an interest in the one or the other, and even when he does not occupy either. When we use the word interest in reference to what a person has a right to, in whole or in part, which he does not possess, we mean that he has not got into possession, or that he has his right in common with others.

But, my present design being to show that all hearers of the gospel have a common interest in Christ through the gospel itself, I [will] proceed to try and make it appear: 1st. That it is a scripture doctrine, and the only reasonable view which can be taken of the subject. 2d. That it is that view of it according to which a sinner has any encouragement to come unto Christ. 3d. That it is that view which lays a sure ground for believing in him. 4th. That it is that view which is greatly encouraging unto him in his application to Christ. 5th. And according to which alone he has any encouragement given him to come to Christ; or according to which he has all his encouragement—every possible and needful encouragement given unto him.

1. In the scriptures this interest in Christ, given to every gospel hearer, is substantially declared through the revelation made of Christ in them to us in the character of a Saviour, which supposes him to be the Saviour of sinners as such—the common Saviour to whom men may apply under a sense of their deep sinfulness before God. He is “the great God our Saviour”—a name which gives to sinners, in common, who hear of him an interest in him.

It is further evident from the calls he gives to men, as sinners, to come to him, as in Matt. 11:28: "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," which both supposes and gives an interest in him. It supposes it, in that it is as the Saviour, officially considered, he calls them; the Saviour appointed by the Father, and by that appointment their Saviour. It is given, hereby, as the call itself is a warrant to believe in him as such. To whom does he call them? It is to himself, as their Saviour, that they may find a sweet rest of soul in him—*q.d.* [*quasi dictum*,—as if (He) said:] "There is a rest and refuge for you in me, as your Saviour, (words of interest), from all your fears and disquietudes of whatever kind, and of peace and joy." The offer which he makes of himself, as a Saviour, is as a Saviour provided of God for them, and being exhibited in the scriptures in this character, their interest in him previous to believing and laying a ground for it, is made evident. The promise of the gospel, under which Christ is particularly included as "the mercy promised to the fathers," being given in the gospel to all the hearers of it, as in Acts 2:39, supposes that interest to belong to them, in common, before believing, and gives it; or, rather, tends to confirm the fact that they possess it as a common privilege. The complaint which he makes over the unbelieving Jews, in the time of his public ministry, "ye will not come to me that ye might have life," supposes it. For what reason could there be for complaint against sinners for not coming to him, as the Saviour, if they have no right to him as sinners, or interest in him? His language over Jerusalem is, "O Jerusalem,

Jerusalem! How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wing, and ye would not!" The hen, while she takes an interest in her young, and from that interest calls them to herself in her way; her brood, according to a law of nature, correspondingly takes an interest in the dam, making and taking her wings as their place of safety from danger; and so does the sinner, believing in Christ, betake himself to him upon a previous interest given him in him. The gospel itself, being good news and glad tidings of great salvation, which shall be to all people, is a proof of this. "For unto you is born, this day, in the house of David, a Saviour, which shall be to all people, which is Christ the Lord."

The whole scriptures are full of this interest. It is to make it known that God has provided us with them. And the very name given them, though not of itself a portion of the inspiration which is in them, implies this;—"*The scriptures of the Old and New Testament.*" The New Testament scriptures are designated, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. They are both of them an exhibition of Christ's Testament, or latter will declared, in the way of exhibiting him to sinners of mankind, who read them, their interest given them in Christ and his salvation, that they may appropriate to themselves the interest which is given in both. For whatsoever is written in them, throughout, is "for our learning that we," every man who reads them, and "through patience and comfort of the scriptures, may have hope." The ground of our hope is in them through our interest declared there, and faith is the evidence of that to

the soul. producing hope. The Lord thus declares it in manifold ways, and the sinner, believing, sees it and rejoices. A large share of the exercise of the saints in claiming God as their God, Christ as their Saviour and Redeemer, and the blessings of salvation laid up for them in Christ, is what they are exercised unto, by believing this interest, as it is given to them, in common with others, in the scriptures, as when David calls God his rock, his fortress, his refuge, his hightower, deliverer and shield, his God, in whom he would trust. Not in whom he had trusted, but in whom he would trust, upon the ground of the revelation he had made of himself to him in his word, as he does to all who are possessed of it.

Being thus a scriptural doctrine, it is worthy of all acceptation by us, and we are bound to receive it with all readiness; and it is a very reasonable view in itself. For, according to the nature of things, the right to anything always precedes our coming into possession of it, if we possess it honestly. Faith is a receiving, but there is a giving before receiving; and, in spiritual things, a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. Believing must have a ground on which the exercise of it is to rest, a matter declared, or a previous right given; and, as appropriation is in it, which belongs to the true faith of the gospel, the matter declared or right given, must correspond with the appropriation which is made. As in believing a sinner takes God to be his God, and the Lord Jesus Christ as his Redeemer and Saviour, it must be on the footing of a warrant to do so, and previous right given; or, in other words, an interest in God and Christ by virtue

of gospel revelation made to us, declaring that we have such an interest, or we have no more warrant to do so than devils possess.

2. It is that view of it according to which a sinner has any encouragement to come to Christ. There is no encouragement at all, that I can discover, given in the other view. If I must be a believer before I have an interest in Christ, my believing must precede that interest, and I am left without any ground on which to believe in him. I have no word of faith that has any application to me, or which my faith may act on. No promise of God, or Christ, to rest on, and I have no more encouragement to believe than devils have, and may give myself up to sad and dismal despair, this being the case. If it should be said Christ is not a Saviour for devils, but he is a Saviour for sinners of the human family, and for me a sinner, this is the very thing in dispute. And, if this is granted, then I have an interest, and may say of him, "The great God, *my Saviour*," which, according to the view I entertain, is everything the sinner needs to know that he may ascertain his welcome to Christ, his right to him, and interest, so that, in the appropriation of faith, he may lay his claim and commit his whole salvation over to him. Believing is expressed by a coming to Christ. But I must see my interest in him through the gospel, and know that the calls, offers, and promises of the gospel are directed to me before I have any encouragement to come to him; and it is by being assured of this, and in so far as I am assured of it, that encouragement is given to me.

If a person must be a believer before he can warrantably

conclude himself to have any interest in Christ, then believing must participate of the nature of a work, which entitles us to that interest in him, and as our salvation is of grace and not of works, there is no encouragement to us in this way. Believing must, in this case [i.e., by those who maintain believing precedes our interest in Christ], be our own act, and be considered to be done by us as a preparative to our interest in him and right to him. But, upon the view we adopt, the right to Christ being in the gospel, and the sinner's interest in him given there, the gospel order of bringing sinners unto him is preserved; as through that revealed in the gospel, declared to us, the Lord Jesus, in the day of his power, apprehends the sinner, drawing him to himself in a saving **work** of the Holy Spirit, who, by the word as the instrument, discovers that interest to the person so as he sees it believingly, and thus apprehends, as Paul speaks of himself, that for which he is apprehended of Christ Jesus; and as the **work** begins where it ought to do, with Christ, so it ends with the person himself, in this gospel order of it.

3. It is that view which lays a sure ground for believing in Christ. If a person's interest in Christ follows believing, and he can not conclude, with right, that he has any interest in him until then, what is called a faith's interest in Christ, by some theologians, he cannot possess, because all evidence concerning it must arise, according to that view, from the fact that he has believed, and he has not to depend on anything in the scriptures for proof concerning that supposed interest in Christ but his own experience, while personal experience is very uncertain and changeable,

being changeable in those who possess experiences of a right kind, so as sometimes they may have them in a very high degree, and at other times are without them altogether; and though sometimes they are in a great measure, without doubt, lifted highly on the wings of faith and hope, and enabled, from the inward workings of grace, to sing "My soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in his salvation." At other times they lose all hope that they are believers. And many are in sad mistake concerning themselves, supposing that they are believers in fact, when they are but going down to hell, notwithstanding the high expectations which they have formed of themselves, with a lie in their right hand. It is on the authority of the word of God, and that alone, the sinner enjoying the gospel is warranted to believe his interest in Christ, as it is revealed to him in the gospel itself, and upon that authority there is sure ground for faith to act. I do not say that a sinner, as a mere hearer of the gospel, can see this. It is but as a believer, and in believing he can discover it; but the discovery of it he then obtains, is a discovery of it as a truth declared to him in the scriptures before he believes, and not made true only by believing. In believing he receives it as a precious truth in which he is himself interested, and continues to live upon it that life of faith in the Son of God which will be bringing in, by the daily exercise of it, spiritual comfort, joy and peace, to his soul.

It is a sure ground laid for the sinner in the word of God itself, and a lasting ground, so as he has it after he believes, to exercise his faith upon, to refresh and strengthen it by,

and preserve it in its vigor. Let Satan tell him he is a sinner, let the world condemn him, and let his own conscience accuse him never so severely. He has in this way a ground on which he may exercise his faith as if he had never believed, and have a new and continued peace in this way. It is in this way that the Apostle directs tempted and troubled souls to seek their relief, from the scriptures throughout, which speak encouragement to gospel hearers of all descriptions upon the ground of this interest given unto them.

4. It is a view of it which is very encouraging to a sinner in the application he makes to Christ. He can go with the plea of faith, grounded on the testimony of God in his word, and present it and plead it to all the extent which the declared interest in Christ which is in the scriptures he is represented as a sinner to have—the warrant which Christ himself gives; the call of the gospel and the promise of the gospel made to him even as a sinner, as in Acts 2:39, warrant him to plead it. He does not need to proceed upon a peradventure in this matter. He is encouraged to come with an holy boldness to God's throne of grace, as God is enthroned on it in grace and mercy in Christ, and plead his interest, turning God's gracious declaration concerning himself, as that he is our God in the gospel revelation of himself—the God of every hearer of the gospel, that he may take an interest in him believingly; and Christ's declaration, also, concerning himself as a Redeemer and Saviour, into a plea, saying, "Do as thou hast said." And doing this in the assurance of faith.

5. It is that view, alone, according to which a sinner has

any encouragement given unto him to come to Christ or believe. If he must believe before he obtains this interest, he never can obtain it, because he wants a ground on which faith can act. Faith, or believing, must be preceded by a giving according to the scripture order of exercising this grace. For, as I have mentioned, "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven," is the language of scripture. And giving, in all cases, implies interest. A thing being given, it is in effect said, "This is yours to receive," and the word *your* implies interest. Both in providence and in grace, it holds that a right or interest given, in what we receive, precedes receiving it, according to the economy of each.

All this shows the welcome every sinner has to Christ, and salvation through him, the free grace of God in our salvation, and that there is no room left for discouragement to any who hear the gospel—the hand of God's mercy being widely spread out to receive sinners, even the chief. But now, we are to remember, is the acceptable time and the day of salvation, and it is a duty incumbent on us to attend to these things which belong to our peace ere they be forever hid from our eyes.—*D.*, (1863).

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